

Abroad

Madrid

Spanish Socialism

The Spanish Socialist Party is widely expected to win the upcoming general elections for the Cortes and therefore to constitute the new government of Spain. After France and Greece, such an outcome would represent a third socialist victory in Western Europe in the last year and a half. But the Spanish Socialist Party leader, Felipe González, is being very cautious about the nature of a Socialist regime in Madrid. He is making few of the sweeping promises made by François Mitterrand, for example, when he was running. There is no prospect of nationalizing Spanish industry, and although the state of unemployment and the inflation rate in Spain (both 15 per cent) make good campaign material, the Socialist leadership recognizes that these problems will be of the first priority for any new government. The Socialists say that the recently acquired Spanish seat in NATO should be the subject of a post-election referendum. This move, however, is regarded as window-dressing; no one inside or outside Spain expects Madrid to surrender what it has waited so long to gain. In terms of domestic politics, the stability of Spanish democracy depends on the health of its political life, and this is perhaps the real issue to be decided in October.

London

Glory and Price

The suggestion in the press that the Victoria Cross, the highest British military decoration, be awarded to certain participants in the recent Falkland Islands war is raising a rumpus. "What is it coming to," asked an annoyed Ministry of Defense official, "when a newspaper discusses just who should and should not get decorations?" Yet as the *Guardian* points out, it was a war correspondent, William Howard Russell, whose dispatches in the *Times* during the Crimean War inspired Queen Victoria herself to create the medal. Since then something over 1,300 VCs have been awarded, all of them struck from the bronze of a Russian cannon captured at Sebastopol—of which only 22 pounds now remain. The Victoria Cross originally carried with it an annual pension of £10, boosted in 1969 to £100 (\$175). The smallness of this sum is thought to be why so many holders of the decoration sell it, especially at auction. The only Victoria Cross to have been won on D-Day in 1944 went earlier this year for £32,000 (\$55,000). The average First World War medal (they were more plentifully awarded during that conflict) goes for £10,000 (\$17,500) at auction these days. Most of the VCs are bought by regimental museums.

Moscow

Recourse to Comecon

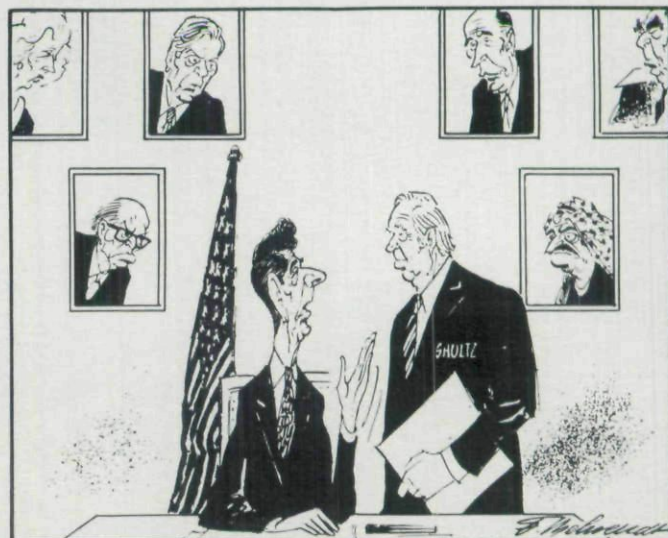
Can Comecon, the economic partnership of the Eastern bloc, do anything to offset the effect of Western boycotts resulting from Poland and Afghanistan? Soviet authorities want to convene an emergency session of Communist leaders "in the near future" to this purpose, with the hope of transforming an ideological patchwork into an effective and beneficial force. Economic integration with its satellites has always been a Soviet goal, but in the eyes of the Eastern Europeans

it has been mainly a euphemism for Soviet exploitation of their own superior productivity. Hungary, for example, which has decentralized, and to a certain extent depoliticized, both its industrial and its agricultural sectors, would respond with great reluctance to the idea of turning its trade around. East Germany, too, has built its successful contacts and outlets outside the Soviet bloc. At the last Comecon meeting, which took place in Budapest this June, there were plaintive cries from the Russians for greater "production cooperation," along with the creation of "effective stimuli" in that direction. Leonid Brezhnev returned to this theme at a more recent meeting with the Czech leadership. When the Comecon summit meeting does take place, it will be dominated by old-guard Communist politicians who are not expected to think creatively in terms of present international reality. But the facts will confront them no matter what they say: the fourth bad Russian harvest in a row; the devastation of the Polish economy through tyranny and mismanagement; the world recession; and the de facto bankruptcies threatening not only the Polish economy but now the Rumanian too, because of default in the repayment of huge Western loans.

Kenilworth

Swan Music of Today

Swans and other decorative waterfowl are the latest items to hit the British auction blocks, and estimates for a pair of the graceful white paddlers run well over £100 (\$175). Sales are being handled by the British Waterfowl Association, located here—a conservation group with impeccable credentials. The market consists chiefly of those people who want something novel to give interest to the grounds and gardens of their country houses. A Waterfowl Association spokesman said real-estate agents told him that "Twenty years ago anyone looking for a desirable country residence would ask first whether it had central heating. Now the buyers ask whether it has a pond or stream in the garden because they want to keep some ducks or other waterfowl." All the birds up for sale, which include harlequin and wood ducks native to North America, have been bred in captivity. (It is against the law to sell wild birds.) "You only need a little pond with clean water to keep a few ducks happy, and they don't cost much to feed," the spokesman commented.



Behrendt, *Het Parool*

Rothco

"Who's angry with us today?"

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